

JAMES H. BAHTI

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: I wonder if you could give me just a little bit of background. Where do you come from?

BAHTI: My home is in Northern Michigan, about as far north in Michigan as you could get. I went to school at Michigan Tech, there became an electrical engineer and became a professor at the university.

Q: When did you graduate from the university?

BAHTI: I graduated from Michigan Tech in 1948, and then was offered a job teaching, provided I took my master's degree. I went to the University of Michigan, got a master's in public administration and then went back to Tech where I taught for three years. I decided I liked teaching and went for my Ph.D. at the University of Michigan for two more years, and then I went back to Tech for another year. In the course of my studies at Michigan I took the Foreign Service exam, more out of curiosity than anything else and by virtue of a 99.5 in math my other lower scores were pulled up to give me a passing grade on the Foreign Service examination.

Q: What would attract you to the Foreign Service? Here you are in the Midwest and at a school of technology and teaching technology. Why the Foreign Service?

BAHTI: It is like the girl in a house of ill repute, "just lucky I guess". I had always had a lot of interest in traveling abroad and even living abroad. In the upper Midwest there was little opportunity for that, although my father had been to Finland as a child.

Q: Is Bahti a Finnish name?

BAHTI: Yes, it originally was Bahtila. It ended up as Bahti. My grandfather was a draft dodger from the Russian army at the time that Finland was a Grand Duchy. So as a teenager he came to the States. My mother's mother had come from Germany so I am a second generation American despite the name.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service when?

BAHTI: In 1955. I took the exam in 1954.

Q: That must have been the old three and a half day examination. When you got into training, I assume that there was a junior officer course, could you characterize the people in it. What were they after?

BAHTI: The one I remember most was Edrie Way. She was in charge and been for a number of years of the Junior FSO Course. We had a man who ran the consular part of it, a man with a very pronounced German accent, Frank Auerbach. He was very scholarly and sometimes very boring. We did not really believe that we would become consular officers although indeed we did. There was another teacher of cultural subjects, Henry Lee Smith, and he was a great expert on cross-cultural conflicts on the personal level, how to identify with natives, or how to expect (or not expect) certain things which you would expect in the States. It was a very good course.

Q: How about the students, where were they coming from?

BAHTI: It was mixed, a number of them were veterans. I believe I was the oldest member of the class, though not by much. I would say about a third of our class or more was made up of male veterans; four women, only one of whom is still around today. And there were a few younger men who had just finished college or perhaps graduate school. One was working on his Ph.D., as I recall. I can see them all. Of those who were in my class, there are not more than two or three who are still on active duty, though many of them are still in the area.

Q: Your first post was Bonn?

BAHTI: It was supposed to be Berlin, but at the last minute it was changed to Bonn. I was assigned to the personnel section. I don't know whether it was chance or by design. I had part of my university training in public administration, including personnel administration. And so I was made a personnel officer with the exotic title of position classification and wage administration, about which I knew very little, especially in the German context. But I spent a good part of a year fumbling my way through that work, working with some very good German local staff, Foreign Service nationals I guess we'd call them now. It was a first rate staff. After almost a year of this, I was on a short leave in Switzerland, and I got a long distance phone call saying, "Come right back, you're appointed a staff aide to Ambassador James Conant." Well, I had no particular qualifications for that job, except that I was the most junior officer in the embassy, or so it seemed. My German was far from fluent at that time and that proved to be a handicap. It was an unusual experience working for such a distinguished person at that time, James Conant, who had been High Commissioner of Germany, and then subsequently was named ambassador. A most unusual person.

Q: How did he operate; what was your impression of the man?

BAHTI: I was not privy to all his operations. There used to be people who came in to brief him, and all I knew about them was their names, from the political section or whatever. [Less of the economic briefings.] One of my jobs was to screen the mountains of paper that came directed to him. After about a week or so of my screening, to judge what he should see and what he needn't see, he said I was giving him too much to read. So I became even more ruthless, weeding out most of the reports from the consulates and neighboring posts. We were there during the Hungarian uprising, that would have been in October 1956. That was a pretty exciting time. There was an awful lot of stuff going on that I did not even know about. I would get calls from people who wanted to help, or wanted to do something. More often than not these would be in the German language, and I'd have to turn it over to someone who could tell me what they wanted. So as I said earlier, my lack of German in that situation proved to be in my view a handicap. Whereas my other contacts in the German Foreign Office and my counterparts in the several embassies with which we dealt frequently, the conversations were almost always in English. So that was no problem, but I did have some interesting experiences traveling with Conant. He traveled a great deal through Germany. He had his own private train. It used to belong the Hermann Goering. The ambassador would regularly, about once a month, take a trip to Berlin to ensure continued access by land to Berlin. He traveled to universities and gave speeches. A USIS official named Bill Sailer would help him with his speeches. Ambassador Conant was quite fluent in German, but Bill Sailer was bilingual, and Bill would work over the speeches with him and sort of polish them up. Conant would attend a number of university graduation ceremonies where he would generally give a speech.

Q: Did you see much of his interaction with the German students and professors?

BAHTI: Well, I was present. There are always spirited conversations, but because of my lack of German I didn't follow or understand what they were talking about. Beyond the weather, deep scholarly subjects. Teaching, he was a teacher himself. He did very little sightseeing. These were business trips. And in Berlin there was a staff aide as well. More often than not shortly after we arrived Conant would tell me I was free to go, so I spent a lot of time roaming about Berlin, getting to know the city. It was always kind of a fun trip. He would allow other people to go on the train with him. It had a dining car, a butler, a cook, cleaning staff. We had these magnificent breakfasts, including freshly baked rolls. Sitting there on a siding, the East Germans watching the capitalists having their breakfast. A military attaché^{1/2} was almost always traveling with us to observe what was going on in the East Zone. And then he had a train sergeant, who had been with that train for a decade or more who would make all the technical arrangements with the Bundesbahn or the German rail authorities. I generally handled the details, making the schedules and notifying the people. The nitty-gritty stuff was done by people like the train sergeant because he knew what he was doing and I would have mucked things up.

Q: When you left Bonn, was your last job the staff assistant one?

BAHTI: Yes, I was replaced by Dave Thompson. I had replaced Bob Hennemeyer who was fluent in German, and Dave Thompson was fluent in German. So I was there 8-10 months. I was directly transferred to Hamburg because at that time the size of the embassy was being reduced rather sharply. We were giving up parts of the chancery to some German ministry, I guess the Defense Ministry. We were taking cuts all over. We needed people in the consular section in Hamburg. The Refugee Relief Program was in progress. I was assigned to the consular section in Hamburg under Ed Maney who had been very active in consular affairs in the Department of State, and overseas as well. He was a great boss. He had a firm rule about rotating officers within the consulate. You just did not go over there and do one job for your whole tour. I had three different jobs when I was there. Consular officer, economic defense officer, which basically had to do with control over strategic materials which were being diverted to the East Bloc, and then finally administrative officer, which was quite an experience and helped me a great deal in later years. So I was there about three years and had about one year in each of these jobs, supported by a superb German staff, people who knew their business. Sometimes you had to explain things to them, that things they'd always done one way did not have to be done that way anymore. Example: getting notarized three copies of a document, each one notarized. Well the cost of notarizing a document was substantial in Germany and I finally said, "Look, just make sure one copy is a notarized copy." Well, it took a long time to convince some of the ladies in our consular section that this was ok. They had become very set in their ways.

Q: At that same time I was in Frankfurt as a vice consul and had the same experience. Absolutely superb staff, but innovation was not the name of the game. Now moving to your next assignment, you went to Washington?

BAHTI: I was assigned to a year of training as a labor reporting officer. At that time labor reporting was very much the thing. I think it has declined a little bit in the eyes of those who require certain types of reporting. At any rate I spent the better part of a year in the Department of Labor and Department of State, spending time with the AFL- CIO and with the trade unions. I had taught labor relations at Michigan Tech, so I suppose I was qualified, though again I don't know if it was an accidental assignment. I'm not sure. We took two courses, one on American labor relations, this was at American University, the subject I knew very well, and then a second course, international labor relations, about which I knew relatively little and that was valuable for dealing with foreign trade unions and trade union associations.

Q: What was your impression of the Department of Labor and its influence on how we should look at things?

BAHTI: We were given a pretty hard sell on the importance of keeping in touch with international labor organizations. People in the Bureau of International Labor Affairs were generally a group of very well informed people. I enjoyed working with them, and I think learned a great deal from them in the international affairs area. Back in the Department, it depended on the person with whom you spoke. Some of them were pretty gung-ho in labor affairs. When I was assigned, it was to Cairo, although initially it was to Japan.

Q: So this was not a hand-tailored assignment?

BAHTI: No. I had the tools for the job, and I also was supposed to go to Sao Paulo. So I started reading up on Brazil. I put away my books on Japan and started reading on Brazil. Then a little bit later I was told I was going to Cairo, which indeed happened to me. It was a political officer's job. Sometimes labor officers are assigned to economic sections. But it was not a full time job. The Egyptians were quite secretive about the details of their labor organizations, and they were indeed in a sense an arm of the political organization, the Arab Socialist Union. So my boss in the embassy, Don Bergus, did not give me the impression that I should be spending all my time on labor affairs. I could not have in any case. So I did the reporting on population planning matters. It was not a subject on which the AID mission spent a great deal of time. I followed the domestic politics, the activities of the Arab Socialist Union, and other things, social affairs, women's affairs, matters in that general category of social-political affairs.

Q: Nasser was really at his peak of influence at that time.

BAHTI: Yes, he had very nearly reached his peak when he nationalized the Suez Canal Company. And he had participated in the Bandung Conference [of non-aligned nations in Indonesia], perhaps less actively than was attributed to him. Yes, he was extremely popular. They would truck in people for some of the rallies but nevertheless most people were very enthusiastic about him. I never really bought the allegation that these were staged affairs. You couldn't really stage something like that. Though at the rallies, yes, there were cheerleaders leading chants. That was different. There were long, long speeches and we attended some of those, even though I could not understand a word of it, just to get the general feel and the audience reaction. We would have the text of it the next day anyway.

Q: The ambassador at this time was John Badeau who was a political appointment. What was your impression of him and his effectiveness from your vantage point?

BAHTI: I could not judge his effectiveness as an administrator but as a human being he was first-class. He had been president of the American University in Cairo. He was an engineer. He had been active somewhat in the religious field, not as a preacher but associated with some church. He was an extremely likeable person and well liked. He was such a human person, took so much interest, as did his wife, in the members of the staff. It was just a pleasure to work for him. He would take the time to write you a note or give you a call if he read something you wrote that he liked. So that was gratifying. His wife was a very pleasant woman without airs, like your mother, so to speak. He was fluent in Arabic, and he could see Nasser virtually any time he wanted to. He would go in and they would exchange proverbs in Arabic. I think he was liked by the Egyptians.

Q: We are talking about the early 60s. You were there from 1961 to 1963, what was the impression the embassy was getting from Nasser and what was he doing?

BAHTI: The impressions varied. The only person who dealt with Nasser was the ambassador. But I think generally people in the political section and maybe elsewhere had the feeling that here was a very, very ambitious man, a dedicated man, who saw himself as the leader of the Arab world promoting not only Arab nationalism but in a sense Arab-African unity. I think we felt that he was overreaching, that he did not have the talent to do all of this. Nevertheless, he was very popular all over the Middle East. You could go almost anywhere, to Yemen, to almost anywhere, and you would see pictures of Nasser on display. Little pictures of him in taxis. He was a very popular man. I think we felt we didn't have any choice, he was the leader, we have to deal with him. We must do the best we can. Now as I read history these days, or read the documents associated with the period, there are those who felt that he had to be cut down to size, that we could not get along with him. Well, he really was not cut down to size. A few scares were put into him but nothing that we ever carried out. We did not like his nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, but what could you do about it? The Canal was always his. It was only the company that he nationalized.

Q: What was the feeling about his adventures abroad? Had he started anything in the Yemen at the time?

BAHTI: Yes, the fighting had begun, with the Saudis apparently backing the royalists and Nasser backing the rebels in Yemen. And again, we were active there although I knew nothing of the exchange of notes. I was probably the highest-priced courier in the Foreign Service, going back and forth between people like Ali Sabri carrying messages, the contents of which I did not know. But other times my boss would say, "Here is something, just give it to anybody with a clean shirt". But other times it had to go to Sabri.

Q: Sabri was who?

BAHTI: Ali Sabri had a number of positions. He was a fairly left-leaning member of Nasser's cadre of high officials. He seemed very competent, but his precise title may have been similar to National Security Advisor and he generally covered those areas. We dealt with him quite a bit, although he was not high on the list of people we liked.

Q: What was the atmosphere of the embassy? Did you feel that the embassy was under siege in an unfriendly country, or what?

BAHTI: No, I don't think anybody had that feeling. There had been some demonstrations earlier, some rock throwing before I arrived, but that was pretty much the last of it, because these could be turned on and off at the will of the government. We had what then seemed like a substantial AID program. It had a different name then, but we were putting a fair amount of money into relatively small projects. We had, of course, backed away from the Aswan Dam deal, but we had things like the manufacture of hard board and paper and things out of local material. The Egyptians wanted that, and they were decent. It took an awful lot of negotiating. I remember negotiating the travel of someone to the United States in the general field of social affairs. It took forever, it seemed to me, to negotiate the terms of this arrangement. There were those in the embassy who did not like to go into the souk or the bazaar, but they were definitely the exception. We kind of laughed at them. I felt perfectly safe anywhere in Cairo, anywhere.

Q: You were somewhat of an outsider coming into a Middle Eastern embassy. Did you have an impression of the Arabists at that particular time?

BAHTI: There weren't many there at that time. The head of the political section, Don Bergus, was an Arabist. Mike Sterner, who later became an ambassador, was an Arabist. There may have been a few others, I don't recall the names. My impression of the Arabists came later. In Cairo we worked together very, very closely. There was none of this, "Are you an Arabist or aren't you?" sort of thing. First of all, you didn't really need it as much there as you did in other Arab posts. Egyptians were generally proud of their English and spoke it quite well, while in other parts of that world it was essential to speak some Arabic. I did start studying it there, learning enough to get into trouble. Give people the impression you could speak it and they would give you a long explanation in Arabic. But there was none of this "I am an Arabist and you are not" type of feeling. I would have liked to have been fluent in Arabic although I did not feel it was essential for my job.

Q: Did you get any feel for how the reporting of our people in Israel was? Was one so absorbed in the Arab world that you looked upon the reporting out of Tel Aviv as 'these people who have been co-opted' and was the feeling reciprocated?

BAHTI: Yes, there was a little of that, as though those in Tel Aviv were somehow defending their clients. We may have exaggerated it, I am not sure. I know the feeling was there, you know 'what are those guys saying, why don't they understand a little more about the real world?' So I guess maybe it was their sense of importance which was exaggerated and maybe indeed three million Israelis were more important than 110 million Arabs. I don't think so, but in terms of domestic politics, it was an important thing. Some of us felt there was a certain bit of color or emphasis that suggested that 'localitis' had affected some of them. This goes back a few years so I can't recall anything specific but there was that impression.

Q: How about the feeling towards the Soviet or Communist 'menace'? How did we feel about that in Egypt at that time?

BAHTI: Well, we knew the Soviets were there in some strength. We tried to keep a pretty close watch on them and know what projects they were supporting. We did go down-I went down and others went also-to see the work being done on the Aswan dam and to make some judgement on the quality of the equipment being used, which is another story. I don't think there was any great concern that the Russians were going to take over Egypt. Some said, "Wouldn't that be nice, let them have it for awhile." We didn't see very much of the Russians. They were a pretty closed society at that time. We did regular reporting on the subject to the extent we knew anything.

Q: Was there a problem with the Russian equipment?

BAHTI: Well, I remember some of the power shovels had ordinary roofs on them, and down at the Aswan dam at 120 degrees these things became like furnaces. One thing I noticed was that they split palm trees and fastened several layers of palm tree chunks to the cabs of these power machines to provide a little more shade and, more important, insulation from the sun in midsummer, which was just horrendous. The trucks looked shabby and beaten up, although I suppose that was inevitable. The equipment supplied to the Egyptian military didn't look all that great, but I suspect it may have been the Egyptian drivers more than anything. Egyptians have a way with vehicles which does them in quickly.

Q: You left Cairo in 1963. Were there any other events that I might have missed that happened at the time?

BAHTI: Nothing really earthshaking. The fighting in Yemen had already started. That was not a burning issue among the Egyptian populace but it was important as far as we were concerned and the Saudis and perhaps to a lesser degree the Yemeni themselves. We were concerned because it was Saudis against Egyptians. There was growing activity in the social field in Egypt. The Arab Socialist Union had been born about that time and there were efforts to make it a more popularly supported organization. It never worked. Most Egyptians with whom I spoke did not know much about it and those who were active were so, I guessed, for personal advancement purposes-to become a member of the ASU if you wanted to become a principal of a school or be assigned as a doctor to something. I never found an Egyptian in that first tour-although I did later on-that said, "Oh yes, I am a member of the Arab Socialist Union." "No, I don't get involved in politics" was the response. But there were things going on. The problem of setting up medical clinics out in the boonies. This was happening and it was a good thing. But the problem was getting a doctor to go out there. Here the doctors were trained or at least financed by the Egyptian government and they wanted to stay in Cairo, they did not want to go out on the farm. There were these efforts to help the population. It wasn't cynical, it was real. And while the average Egyptian might not have a clinic he knew a town not far away which had one or he knew someone whose son was sent to college by the government and all this gave rise to hope. The problem was that this college education was misdirected into commerce and law instead of into engineering and science. So it was going on and the people knew it.

Q: How about the population? You were reporting on populations. Was that as important as it later became?

BAHTI: No, a lip service was paid to population planning, but in a practical sense very little was done. I knew some of the U.N. people associated with population planning, and they just shrugged. Traditionally it has been opposed by Muslims in many parts of the world as an effort to keep down the size of this religious group. You start talking with an intelligent person and he would agree with you. The ones I was talking to did not have that many kids of course. There were poster campaigns but they had very little effect. It reflected on their machismo. Indians are much better at it, and we can get into that later if you wish.

Q: You left Cairo in 1963 and went back to Washington. What were you doing there?

BAHTI: I was assigned to Near Eastern Economic Affairs, and I was particularly responsible for Egypt and Syria, which meant I would analyze reporting, work with the AID people on programs, looking into proposed programs for political sensitivity, generally dealing with the neverending demands for briefing papers on what was happening in Egypt, on oil for instance. It was a mixed bag of economic analysis and a tremendous amount of reading the reporting from the field on Egypt and on Syria, about which I knew relatively little. Actually the month I arrived in Cairo (in September 1961) Syria left the United Arab Republic. It had only lasted three and a half years. But the Egyptians more often than not tended to be a little overbearing in their relations with their brothers and sisters to the north, and the Syrians resented it, so they left the union.

Q: Did you get any feel for how our AID program was working at that time in Egypt, and did we have an AID program in Syria also?

BAHTI: I think our programs in Syria were largely food programs, PL 480, and various relief programs administered by private and voluntary organizations. In Egypt we had no big projects. There were small things far removed from Cairo, and we liked to see that clasped hand symbol [the AID logo], but the Egyptians didn't really care to advertise too much that the Americans were doing this. They tolerated it and accepted it but they did not want to make a big show of it. Oh, they would have an opening ceremony but it did not get a whole lot of coverage in the press or on television. And it was not all that much money, although, as I said, it seemed like a lot at the time.

Q: Were there any particular efforts that you could see that we were trying to push policies or was it just the idea that there were people who needed help and we were going to give it a try?

BAHTI: I think it was the latter. We did not have a weapon or tool strong enough to influence. Let me qualify that. The food program in Egypt was more important than any technical assistance or any programs to build plants or whatever. Yes, the food program was important. The shipping of grain and flour primarily and to a lesser extent dried milk and a few other matters. This was important and the Egyptians fully realized that and therefore they could not become very nasty. But they would not bow to our wishes under the threat of the termination of that program. They might modify their position or be fairly decent about it. They certainly listened to us. One of the groups I dealt with was the Afro-American Peoples' Solidarity Organization which we were concerned was Communist dominated, which it was. The man in charge in Cairo was one of the most pleasant persons I ever knew, an author, a distinguished author. You could see him any time and he would listen to me and give me a cock-and-bull story about what they were or were not doing. I would walk back and report it with my comments, and that was that. I had no power to say, "listen you cut out doing this or we are going to cut out that PL 480." We just were not going to do it, it was a question of need, it was a question of people.

Q: You went to the Brookings Institute from 1966-67, was that a sabbatical?

BAHTI: In a sense. I had seen the announcement of the Federal Executive Fellows at Brookings, and at that time I had been working on the Arab economic boycott of Israel, which was a very touchy and very hot subject politically in the United States. All kinds of efforts were being made by people like the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee to eliminate the boycott. 'We must stop sending food to Egypt' or to threaten to stop aid if they kept boycotting Israel. All kinds of cockeyed ideas, thinking that we had the power to turn off the Arabs, which in fact we did not have. There was so much misinformation. For instance...

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...there was the general belief that if you hired Jews that you could not do business with the Arab world. That was wrong. It was believed that if you did business with Israel you would be boycotted. That was wrong. There were any number of misstatements of fact about the meaning of the boycott. I wanted to get that studied and, I hoped, published in a form in which we could say, "Here are the facts of the case." So I wanted to go to Brookings for a fellowship with the idea of doing a study in depth of the Arab boycott of Israel, which I did. Brookings did not print it, they gave me about fifty copies in lithoprint form, which I distributed to different people and tried to get it published in several places, without success. But it still is, as far as I am concerned, the bible on the Arab economic boycott, at least up to the date when the Export Control Act modified rules as far as the boycott was concerned. It first of all required that American firms report requests for information, 'you must agree not to send this on a boycotted vessel' or 'you must not send this via Tel Aviv', things like that. That was considered a boycott, but that to me was not, it was simple common sense, you simply do not send an Arab shipment by way of Haifa or whatever. In any case I spent seven months at Brookings and did this study. I then went back and worked in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraqi Affairs, in what we called ARN, Arab States North.

Q: Again on the economic side?

BAHTI: Just a general desk officer, we did not have an economic section in ARN. The bureau had been reorganized slightly at that time. It was kind of holding pattern for me. I had been marked to replace Ted Wahl as Roy Atherton's number two in Arab-Israeli Affairs. So by the summer of 1967, shortly after the '67 war I moved from ARN to being deputy for Roy Atherton in Israeli-Arab Affairs. I continued with my boycott work which was a good part of my activity.

Q: Let's keep on with the boycott work to begin with. Was the misinformation just misinformation the way it normally comes or was this an effort on the part of those who were trying to break it, particularly the Jewish lobby, to make it seem much worse than it was in order to create antagonism, how did you see it?

BAHTI: Well, it was both but primarily the latter. The Arabs were very inept. There were indeed one or two letters asking whether you have Jews working for you. Very bad PR type inquiries. Those were exceptions, but it became a credo, commonly believed, that this was the way the boycott worked, but it wasn't. There was this effort to build this boycott up as a terrible, terrible thing affecting American business and having strong religious overtones, which was not the case. That was the purpose of my study, to show the way it really worked.

Q: Did you have problems or attacks on you by the Israeli lobby?

BAHTI: I was never personally involved to that extent. I remember briefing congressmen in a sort of adversarial sense, or groups of people sponsored by congressmen who would present these huge petitions asking us to do certain things. I was more involved in some of the classic cases, the Ford boycott, the Coca Cola boycott, the Xerox boycott, all of which were unbelievably stupid cases. I say stupid in the sense that the Arabs should not have boycotted these firms in the first place, but once the ball started rolling, they could not stop it rolling.

Q: I heard a story when I was in Saudi Arabia that there was a small factory producing punch cards for IBM in Israeli so that at one point the Arabs decided to boycott IBM until the Egyptians said, "Cut it out fellows, our whole mobilization plan is based on IBM punch cards!" Can you talk about how you dealt with one of these boycott cases?

BAHTI: Let's take the Ford case which was fairly simple; the Coke case is much more complex. Ford had agreed to permit semi-knocked-down kits, which is in effect an automobile minus its wheels, which reduces shipping costs, to be assembled in Israel. This was described by some Arab representative as a big assembly plant like the Ford plant at River Rouge, or Dearborn, in Israel. Ford did the same thing in Morocco, sending these knocked-down kits to a distributor where he would bolt the wheels onto the frame, and there was your car. That was the amount of the assembly, but somehow the Arabs got the notion that this was a big, big assembly plant. So they said that if you do that in Israel we will boycott you. Well, Ford said, "What do you mean? This is not an assembly plant."

We spent months and months, the embassy there, and I dealing with Arab embassy officials here, primarily Egyptian, trying to explain what this was all about. They said, "Yeah, yeah, we know, but there is no way we can stop it." Ford was boycotted. There had been a Ford plant in Alexandria, Egypt in which they had done the same thing for awhile, which Egypt closed down. I was in almost weekly contact with the Ford people on that matter.

The Xerox case: they had sponsored a TV film which was adjudged by the Arabs to be favorable to Israel and they boycotted Xerox. The Coca Cola case, briefly; an Israeli bottler had wanted to open up a bottling plant in Israel. Coca Cola said he did not have enough money, the means, he was not financially strong enough to do this so they refused. The bottler in Israel planted the story that the U.S. had caved in to Arab pressures and therefor had refused to let him bottle in Israel. One thing led to another; Coca Cola did not concern itself about being boycotted by the Arab states; that was just a tiny part of its sales. They were concerned about the supermarkets in the United States-about Coca Cola being boycotted there in response to their refusal to permit the bottling of Coca Cola in Israel. So they said, "O.K. we will let you bottle in Israel." They were boycotted by the Arabs. A few years later the bottler went belly up; the Coke people were right in the first place, but the damage had been done. It was said that Nasser had a few thousand cases of Coke stashed away in his basement because that was his favorite soft drink.

Q: Did you find that it was maybe the Arab dealers in Land Rovers or the like who were starting the rumors about the Ford cars? Was this getting involved in souk [Arab marketplace] politics?

BAHTI: Yes. This was probably inevitable. People would plant notions. You can recall the story about the local Coca Cola distributor planting the story about Pepsi Cola that it came from pepsin which came from the stomach of a pig. This caused Pepsi to lose a lot of business until they got that straightened out. The Arab dealers are not above such dirty tricks. I am not sure this was the case with Ford.

Q: How did the 1967 War, between Israel and some of its Arab neighbors hit your office and your operation?

BAHTI: It did not really put us out of business but it certainly had a real impact. One of my closest Arab friends in Washington was the economic officer of the Egyptian embassy. We had had social contact, professional contact. I remember the day of the war calling him and saying, "Abdul, this is about the saddest day of my life". I really like Egypt, Egyptians; I liked Abdul Rahman Hammoud and he said it was a very sad day for him, too. We saw very little of each other after that although it became clear that the initial allegations of our participation were untrue.

Q: We had severed relations at that point.

BAHTI: Although they had an interests section here, I may have seen him after that. I can't recall specifically the impact on our work. Since I was dealing with Israel and Israeli affairs my focus was largely on the aftermath of the war, what we could and could not do, there was an almost daily demand for briefing papers on Arab-Israeli affairs.

Q: Did you have the impression that the 1967 war came about in a step by step manner-Nasser asking that the UN troops withdraw etc. It was not a sudden crisis. Did you have the feeling that we saw where this thing was headed?

BAHTI: I did not and many of my colleagues did not. There were those who were privy to some intelligence not available to me who probably saw the inevitable sequence of events that was developing, and we did set up a task force about a week in advance of the June war to sort of generate control of the distribution of documents, keeping a round-the-clock watch on matters, what was the latest news, keeping the Secretary fully informed. He would drop in on the task force at unannounced times just to check on things. Once the war started we had a tremendous problem of keeping people out of the task force work area; these were people who were just personally or otherwise interested. We had to physically bar them from coming in and messing through the flood of papers that were coming in. Then there was the whole matter of the sinking of the U.S.S. Liberty, a Naval vessel sunk by Israeli aircraft which took a lot of attention.

But to get back to your question, I must blush when I say I told Roy Atherton that there was not going to be any war. I could not have been more wrong. I just did not have access to information that he had. I was convinced that Nasser would tell the UNEF (United Nations Emergency Forces) to take their time getting out or that the Secretary General of the UN himself would do something. You know he rolled over and played dead, I think he could have stopped this thing.

Q: Many people feel that way. It was U Nu at the time. They feel that there was far too much cooperation in getting the forces out which meant that there would be just the Arabs and Israelis facing each other.

BAHTI: I guess maybe after the Secretary General retired he wrote that he had no choice in the matter, but I thought he moved with undue haste.

Q: That was the feeling at that time, surprise that they were scurrying out of there.

BAHTI: That may have been the time of our setting up this task force. I don't know what extra intelligence was available. I certainly did not have access to all of it.

Q: You then became involved in Arab-Israeli affairs.

BAHTI: IAI - Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs.

Q: What was the difference between this focus and other areas?

BAHTI: Dealing with Israel is quite a different kettle of fish than dealing with the Arab states. You had a very competent bureaucracy in Israel. You had statistics, you had data generally available with which you could work and be generally confident about because they had very, very good people. With the Egyptians you never could be sure what they told you was statistically correct. It very likely was exaggerated-talking about trade union membership, percentage of a vote that went to so-and-so as compared to so-and-so. The Israelis have an open press, not too much censorship. You had more to work with, you could make, in my view, a better analysis, make certain statements with a higher degree of certainty that what you were saying was correct. For instance our economic assistant programs, we just gave them the money, they ran the programs. Whereas in Egypt we had what was then a large but nowhere near as large as today, economic assistance mission. There was a lot of currency available for an awful lot of projects. There were a lot of research projects going on in Israel. One of the things that I did was to review these proposed projects for political sensitivity. Not only the project itself, but where the project was to go. Was it right near the armistice lines, for instance.

Q: Were we very concerned at that time about the West Bank?

BAHTI: The question of settlements had not become very important at that time. It subsequently became much more important. Just keeping up, what are they doing in East Jerusalem? Where was the parade going to be held this year? What can we do to stop them from taunting the Arabs by going through the Arab sector of the occupied areas. We would get daily calls from parents of Jewish kids who were in Israel, maybe working on kibbutzim or wanting to go to kibbutzim or moshavim, which in many cases were in areas we considered dangerous. I felt quite free to tell the parent, "Look, if he is going to Israel don't let him go to that kibbutz, there have been terrorist incidents in the area with some frequency. Have him go somewhere else where it is safer. We don't want another death case to report."

Q: How did you see the effect of the Israeli lobby and how did it operate?

BAHTI: It is one of the most effective lobbies in Washington. They have a great deal of money and we had a fair amount of contact with the Arab-Israel Public Affairs Committee [AIPAC]; they put out a good, although quite biased, newsletter, the Near East Report. The head of it, Si Kenon, was a very fine gentleman. There was no question of where he stood, but you could tell him things in confidence and he would keep them in confidence; he would not blab them around. Or he could tell you things quite frankly and say, "look, this is what is going to happen if thus and so happens" and that is the way it would work out. He was well plugged into, not only his own organization AIPAC, but most of the other pro-Israel lobbies in Washington, and of course with Congress. One of our big jobs was responding to Congressional correspondence, which in turn generally reflected constituent correspondence. A constituent believes thus and so happened, please advise me, give me a report on the subject. We had Congressional correspondence you can't believe. The volume was such that it took much of our time. Although sometimes you could send out a fairly boiler-plate type letter, it more often had to be tailored to this special case. We would get letter writing campaigns, thousand of identical text letters, generally mimeographed. One such case I remember came from Philadelphia. I had to keep count of them, as though this were going to affect our decision. I told one group that if they were at a horse race and their horse is losing do they think that their yelling makes him go any faster? This was the time the Iraqi Jews were being executed and we were being exhorted to "do something" about this. Nobody ever said what. In this particular campaign from Philadelphia I noticed after awhile that all the letters were signed with about four different types of hand-writing, in other words four people were signing all the letters, but with different names. They were using a phone book, a synagogue list or something. So you can imagine that had much less impact; when I pointed this out to the Assistant Secretary, he was much less impressed by the volume of such letters.

A member of Congress sponsored a visit of his constituents who came in with bales of letters and petitions. I briefed them on the particular issues; I don't remember what the issue was. Finally someone said, "What impact will these petitions have on what you are doing?" I said, "I told you I would be frank. The impact will be very little" and gave them the analogy of the horse race. The Congressman was furious. I said, "I am encouraged by your interest in this subject, but I would much rather see your efforts directed towards some other activity, such as promoting better relations between the Arab and Jewish communities, or study seminars; there are any number of things you can do." Well that did not go over too well. It is kind of fun to collect petitions and come to Washington with a bale of them and be briefed by a State Department officer.

I was very active in public speaking around the country. A lot of my colleagues did not like to do that, but I got a big kick of it. After the first talk that I gave to a men's synagogue group in Brooklyn, which was trial by fire, I realized that "Hey, you know a hundred times more about this subject than almost anybody in your audience. And I felt perfectly at ease. First of all you knew what the questions, most of the questions, were going to be and you had a nice, neatly tailored answer for them. Second, you could cite facts and figures that they simply did not have. It was not always Jewish groups, it was high school groups, university groups. At that time the State Department was sending around teams for a while explaining about Vietnam, Arab-Israeli affairs, South African affairs, various touchy subjects.

Q: Did you have the feeling at that particular time, we are talking about 1967-69, we were trying to keep a fairly even hand in the whole Arab-Israeli thing, or for political reasons siding more with Israel?

BAHTI: I think in theory we were trying to keep an evenhanded approach, and many of us tried to keep the approach from tilting too much. As a matter of fact it was my view that domestic pressures were such, pressures from Congress were such, that we had no real choice but to lean in favor of Israel, which was described as our only dependable ally in the Middle East, and things of that nature-the only practicing democracy. We kind of retched at some of this stuff, but when I spoke to people I told it like it was. I got a lot of hostile questions, but I was able to defend myself. In answer to your question, yes, I think we bowed to Congressional pressure on much of this. There were all these resolutions and so on, and sometimes legislation - the anti-boycott legislation was one of the dumbest things we have ever done. We fought it tooth and nail because, a) we knew it would not work, and b) we were shooting ourselves in the foot, just surrendering the whole field to the Japanese and the Germans and the British and so on, who did not really care at all about the boycott regulations; they went along with them because it meant business. The Chamber of Commerce fought it, but the pressures from AIPAC and Congress were such that we got this anti-boycott legislation. That is the kind of example of slanting U.S. policy because of Congressional and domestic pressures.

Q: How about the other side? Did you have the feeling that the Arabist, these were specialists in the State Department who studied Arabic and all, had their particular slant? How did you feel about them?

BAHTI: It was almost inevitable that they would react to what I think we all, and I am not an Arabist, considered a distorted policy reflecting domestic pressure and not reflecting major U.S. interests in the Arab world, by which I mean oil and commerce primarily. A question I got many times was, which was more important, Jewish blood or Arab oil? I said it was not the question, you really can have both if you bring about an equitable solution. There was almost an automatic reaction among some of the Arabists. If a particular piece of legislation or activity came up, they would say, "Wait a minute, who is sponsoring this, who wants this, who is back of it?" There was the almost instinctive feeling, if this was indeed the usual type of legislation or speech that this was pro-Israel. How do we react to it, how do we give an even handed response? I have gotten that question many times from audiences. Why is the Arabist crowd in the State Department so anti-Israel? I would say we are not anti-Israel, we are not pro-Arab, we are pro-American. I said that I had never yet seen a policy recommendation which was not at heart in response to the question, is this good for the United States? I told my audience that "I hope that you would have it no other way." Some of them would, of course. I think I can say in all honesty that U.S. interests were overriding in every case, but the gut reaction in many instances was, "Gee, this is so violent pro-Israel, or anti-Arab, that we have to do something about it." Which was often the case.

Q: There is not an Arab lobby in the United States?

BAHTI: No. Nothing very effective. There are a few good Arab ambassadors, not many. I remember talking to my Arab friends, particularly Egyptians, saying, "Why can't you guys get your act together and do something half as well as AIPAC does. You have got all this money, hire a good Jewish PR firm." In fact that is what some of them did, whether the firms were Jewish or not I don't know, and it is not important. You have got a story to tell. Remember the time of the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, they came out with this full page ad saying, "It is time for a Balfour Declaration for the Arabs" and that was pretty effective, provided the reader knew what the Balfour Declaration was about. They could do things well, for example the ARAMCO World put out by the Arabian-American oil company, a beautiful publication, is not politically oriented, just good stuff about the Islamic world, not just the Arab world. The Jordanians have had some good material. Palestine Perspectives, Arab Perspectives tend to be pretty shrill and "overkill", they turn off the reader. It is so heavy-handed that way. They never say, "Yes, we can understand the Israeli problem with security, their gut feeling that they will always be insecure." There is never any admission of that this might conceivably exist. This is too bad, because the Israelis, many of them, honestly believe that the Holocaust could happen again although we know militarily they can beat any combination of Arab states.

Q: You were then sent to Bombay?

BAHTI: I said, "Look, I would like to get out of the Arab world for a while. I am too emotionally involved in it. I would like to stay in the Bureau but how about something else?" They said I could go to Karachi, Bombay or a third post, perhaps in Iran. So I said I would go to Bombay. I became the deputy to the consul general in Bombay from 1970 to 1972. It was a very rewarding experience. I learned early on to see the country, see it early because at the end of your tour you don't have time. We did a lot of traveling, most of it official, but not all of it. I say a great deal, not only of our consular district, but other parts of India. AID had an excellent program in Delhi which lasted a week covering cultural, social, history which my wife and I were encouraged to take. My boss Dan Braddock was on his last tour, a very fine gentleman.

I think the most fortunate part of this tour was that prior to my departure I had asked my college, Michigan Tech, to give me a list of the alumni living in India; several lived in the Bombay area, and one in particular I found almost by chance. He had the name Shah, which is a name held by perhaps ten million other Indians, and I was walking down the street one rainy monsoon day shortly after my arrival with my wife. I saw the name Shah and I said, "Oh, he is one of the Michigan Tech guys" and I walked to the door and said, "I am looking for an Arvind Shah who went to Michigan Tech". He said, "I'm Arvind Shah and I went to Michigan Tech". They were fairly well-to-do, they did not need us for anything, we just became good friends. We still see them, their kids are in school in the States. It was a delightful introduction. They would take us to their religious observances, if we wanted to go. They did not push anything on us, they were very relaxed. They loved to gamble with three card Indian poker, they did not drink, they did not eat meat, but did not care if we did. They would come to our house and we would serve meat but have plenty of vegetarian dishes too. It was one of the most rewarding tours I have had in getting to know the host country.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, after less than two years I was offered the principal officer job in Dhahran. My boss at that time was David Baine who had been ambassador to Gabon. He said, "Jim, it is always better to be number one than number two." That had been my conclusion after about thirty seconds. My wife said "Fine" so we bundled up our cats and our household effects and went off to Dhahran.

In Bombay I supervised both the small economic and small political sections and did some political reporting myself.

Q: What was your impression of the Indian officials with whom you dealt and the situation in that part of India at that time?

BAHTI: Generally competent. Some of them tended to be a little preachy, pious almost, but not many. That was a time that the troubles between India and Pakistan broke out again, the fall of 1971 and so there was a degree of unpleasantness, the officials got a little stiff. Some would refuse to accept invitations because of our policy. I reminded one of them that they had very short memories, that we had come to their help when the Chinese invaded India, but that was then, and this was now. The consul general's secretary was stoned, but not really hurt, she had stones thrown at her as a foreigner. When our friends, the Shahs gave a party, they would hustle around saying "Don't discuss the situation" meaning the political situation, they did not want us to be embarrassed. But a few people got, not nasty, but highly critical. The press vastly distorted what we were doing for Pakistan. The refugee program - the refugees from Bengal or from what became Bangladesh became quite a problem, so we were fairly active in tracking that, but obviously not as active as our people in Calcutta would have been. There was a lot of activity of support for the refugees from East Bengal. It was an interesting time to be there. It is a fascinating country-you could spend your life there and just begin to scratch the surface.

Q: You went to Dhahran where you served from 1972 to 1975. What was the situation there, and what were you doing as consul general?

BAHTI: I had followed Lee Dinsmore who had been responsible not only for the Dhahran area but also for visiting all the emirates and sheikdoms in the Gulf area. That was about the time we were establishing embassies at most or all of these posts. Therefore my range of responsibility had considerably declined. It was also a time when the wheels were in motion for making ARAMCO a totally Saudi company. That went on all the while I was there and continued after I left. I did quite a bit of reporting on oil, oil and consular affairs were our main business. We did not do much other political reporting as there was not that much going on, the action was in Jeddah and Riyadh.

Q: You were in the Eastern Province.

BAHTI: Right. It was maybe the best post I have ever had, a beautiful residence and the ARAMCO people were wonderful neighbors, most but not all of them were Americans. They gave us tremendous support. We did have a lot of administrative problems; we had, for instance, our own electric power plant and that was constantly in need of redoing, refurbishing. ARAMCO finally stopped sending us gas through a pipeline because of their growing construction area needs. We went onto bottled gas with a huge storage tank. The day the valve was opened all the pipes blew up. They had become so corroded over the years that the increased pressure, the high pressure from the tank as compared to the lower pressure from the pipeline from ARAMCO, did this. Gas was coming up all over the place. So we spent a couple of months replacing the gas lines and living off small bottle gas containers in individual residences. The Saudi National Guard had been living on the grounds in tents. It was kind of a messy situation so my administrative officer, Bruce Christopherson, decided that we could give up one of our empty warehouses. They were delighted. We gave them a TV set.

Q: What was the National Guard doing there?

BAHTI: After the 1967 war [between Israel and the Arab states] the consulate was attacked. Not much damage was done, some rocks were thrown and some windows broken, the Saudis were very embarrassed. It was led by Palestinian students from the college next door, the College of Petroleum and Minerals, and from that point on the Saudis stationed forty or fifty National Guardsmen there just to protect us. One of the administrative problems, the sand was continually drifting against the walls so that you could walk right over them so that every three months we had to get a bulldozer to clear away the sand so that people could not just walk into the compound over the walls.

Q: I have to say for the record that I served in Dhahran from 1958 to 1960 and we had almost given up on the sand at that time, but we had not been attacked.

BAHTI: We did put barbed wire on top of the wall, put in a gate keeper. There was a school on the compound. About a week after I arrived the admin officer gave me a folder about six inches thick and said, "Oh, by the way there is a school board meeting today and you are the president of the school board." I said, "that was not in my job description." That was my biggest cross during my three and a half years in Dhahran. Not only trying to make peace among the various members of the school board but to go through two different expansions of the school. ARAMCO would not take on the responsibility of teaching the children of its contractors, all of whom lived off the ARAMCO compound. So knowing there was an American school they turned to us. It seemed there were construction people on the compound all the time putting up prefabricated classrooms. I think ultimately after I left they put in an air conditioned enclosed tennis court. Financing this thing and trying to find a contractor who would take on a relatively small job were problems. This school was small potatoes, so we got very bad contractors. I remember the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers came by once and looked at what had been done and said, "Mr. Bahti, I think this is about the worst electrical job we have seen in Saudi Arabia." You could not get people for a job for a few hundred thousand dollars.

Q: Were there any particular difficulties you were having at the time? You were there during the 1973 [Arab-Israeli] war.

BAHTI: I don't know if I was prescient or not but about a month before the 1973 war I went on home leave and I was on my way back on a round-the-world swing and was just leaving Hawaii where I was visiting a War College classmate and as I was leaving his staff aide said, "Oh, by the way, war has broken out in the Middle East and we think it may last longer than the 1967 war." I said, "Well, they have my schedule and if they want me they know where to get me." I went on to Hong Kong and Djakarta and Singapore where I received a cable asking me to get right back. My number two man was getting fatigued, constant NIACTs [Night Action cables-one is alerted day or night for these] and generally keeping alert for what reactions might develop. What was happening to oil shipments, oil was embargoed for several months. So I went back-I had to overnight in Bombay as I could not get a direct connection, my wife stayed on in India for about a week.

I had to hit the deck running, maintain frequent contact with ARAMCO to get their view of what was going on. Problems of security. The fighting was largely over by then but nevertheless the aftermath...we had frequent visitors. It seemed that every Congressman wanted to see where the oil used to come from. I had to deal with high Saudi officials, though of course the embassy had primary responsibility. That was a very busy time.

Q: How did you deal with the Saudi officials at that time?Whom did you deal with, and what was your relationship?

BAHTI: On oil matters I simply did not deal with the Saudi authorities, I dealt with ARAMCO. I did have occasion to meet Yamani [Saudi minister for petroleum] and I visited and met the king, but my day-to-day duties were largely with the amir, Bin Jiluwi and he was very pleasant. We had no serious problems; I think the biggest one was the practice of contractors of dumping their construction waste in front of the consulate rather than taking it to the designated dump.

A consular officer, Jim Hooper at the time and later Tom Wulitch had to deal with the local police officials because Americans were in trouble, either making liquor, sadiki juice, or dumb kids who would come back with a pinch of marijuana in their baggage and get caught, or the American at the airport bringing a bottle of liquor, not knowing that you could not bring anything into the country like that. So that took a lot of time of our consular officer. We only had at the time one consular officer; shortly after I left we got a second one. One time the Department said, "We are thinking of sending a female consular officer to replace so and so, how would you feel about this?" I said, "I am second to none about women's rights, but since she could not drive a car, (women were not allowed driver's licenses) and many Saudis would not deal with her in a meaningful sense," I said, "I don't think she would be effective; we would have to have a special driver for her." Ultimately we did get a female consular officer, but she was "Miss Inside" and we had a male who was "Mr. Outside", so that worked out OK, but at the time it would have simply been wasting resources.

It was an exciting time. I hate to say this but ARAMCO was a great party crowd and there were always big fun parties. Then there were the desert trips, hunting for arrowheads and stone axes. You could come back with a bucket full of these things after a three or four day trip. You could go a long way equipped with sand tires. It was the sort of thing we enjoyed doing with ARAMCOs-you never did by yourself.

Another point of living there, as I mentioned in our so-called hardship report or whatever it was called: you could not take a cold shower in summer because the water that came out of the water tank was so heated by the sun that it was simply too hot to bear. You would fill the bath and put in ice cubes so you could comfortably take a bath. No one in Washington believed that, they thought I was pulling their leg.

Q: During the 1973 war, did the Saudis do anything to the consulate or its operation?

BAHTI: No it was pretty much business of usual. I was told that initially they beefed up the National Guard when the war started, of course I was not there during those initial days, but I really saw no differences. The war was so far removed from the average Saudi, except for the top levels who, of course dealt with the ambassador, the subject never came up.

Q: How did you see the House of Saud as reflected in the Eastern Province? Did you feel there was a chance that the new middle class that was developing in Saudi Arabia might take over or challenge the regime or did you feel that this was a system that was going to continue?

BAHTI: I felt as a system it was going to continue for one simple reason, why kill the goose that is laying the golden egg? Everybody was making out like bandits. Land prices were skyrocketing. Kids could be sent to college with virtually no cost. The best equipped hospitals in the world, not necessarily the best hospitals, were being set up. There was something for virtually everybody. Why upset that?

I heard the question you just asked many times while I was there and, except for the Shia community, which was larger, relatively larger in the Eastern Province, nobody was really hurting.

Q: Most of the Saudis were Sunnis except for a couple of villages up the coast, as I recall, which were Shia.

BAHTI: That's right. The police, I won't say were oppressive there, but the Shia were pretty carefully watched. There was no sign of any dissident activity that I was aware of. There may have been. It was alleged that the demonstration at the Great Mosque was Shia inspired, and it may have been, but I suspect it was more pilgrims than resident Shia. Many of the Shia worked for ARAMCO. ARAMCO had a disproportionate number of Shia working for them, in part because the Sunni Saudi did not want to do manual labor. If it were not for the Shia and Yemeni workers there in the hundreds of thousands, a lot of dirty work would not have been done. They dug the ditches. About the lowest work a Saudi would do would be to drive a taxi, and maybe do electronic repair, which is a little more glamorous, perhaps, but it was a rare case to find a Saudi who would do anything to get his hands dirty.

Q: Talking about difficulties with the authorities because of liquor being prohibited and marijuana and all that. Did you have any problems with Americans being held because of their having business disputes. I remember when I was there that this could be a major problem.

BAHTI: Yes. I can't think of specific instances but I do recall instances at the time and since then. First of all you had to have a sponsor to get into the country. Normally it would be ARAMCO but it could be a Saudi businessman and the Saudi businessman would be responsible for the visitor and he would hold his passport. If you got into a business dispute or whatever, say wanted your deposits back or could not deliver something until such and such a date, then there would be a built-in penalty, usually financial, you could not get out of the country, not necessarily go to jail, although that could happen too, because the Saudi courts were almost always on the side of the Saudi. The feeling was, rightly or wrongly, that you could not get a fair shake if you were not a Muslim, especially if you were not a Saudi. If you were a contractor working for ARAMCO, it was different. ARAMCO was very well plugged into the legal side, they had their own legal Muslim law specialists. They would take care of their own people, their contractors. Not if they were in drug things-but even there they might get them amnestied on certain religious holidays or expelled. It could be a terrible thing-a kid might be coming from a school in India with some marijuana and the whole family could be expelled from Saudi Arabia. It was kind of unfair, but that was the way it was. I believe it is still the case pending the settlement of a financial, usually a financial, dispute.

Q: You left Dhahran in 1975 and you came back to Washington?

BAHTI: That was sort of off-cycle in the assignment process. Most of the assignments were made in the summer and you bid on them. I had extended six months, so I was offered a job with the Inspector General, and I was happy to take it. I had heard good tales from some of the officers who had been inspectors. You could take your wife along if you paid for her ticket. You could usually get along on the per diem. Bob Sayre was inspector general at the time and Bob Yost was one of his deputies. I started off doing a domestic inspection which never came to much. Then I went off and did Iceland, the UK and Ireland. That was fun; my wife joined me in London and we saw quite a bit of the U.K. on weekends.

I forget the exact sequence, but I did some posts in central Africa, some posts in Latin America, did all of Canada and one or two domestic inspections including International Organizations, which involved a trip to Vienna. So that was a rewarding experience. My problem with being an inspector was that you really had to make a judgment in rating certain groups of officers on the basis of very little knowledge, it seemed to me. You read some of their reporting, you talked to them, you then had to do a performance evaluation. I was always very uncomfortable with that. So I tended, to protect my own conscience, to be more generous than if I had known the person if he or she had been working for me. If you were going to make a mistake, make it on the side of generosity rather than strictness. I received some criticism for that, but I did not care, my conscious was clear.

Q: I know after having served on a promotion panel that so much weight can be given to something is at all critical that you want to be bloody well sure that whatever you have to say has real foundation, rather than doing it to make your reporting look more worthy.

BAHTI: In effect you are ranking a number of Cadillacs and you see a tiny scratch on one, or a tiny blemish on another, not very important, but that can make the difference. It is kind of too bad.

Q: This gave you a good look at how the Foreign Service operates. What was your impression, where were its strengths and weaknesses?

BAHTI: That is a pretty broad question. One impression I had was that so much depends on the principal officer, the man in charge. He can do so much to affect the morale of the post, the harmonious working relationship among them. He has to be conscious of what is going on. I have found some ambassadors totally oblivious to morale problems. These were generally at large embassies, of course. At smaller embassies they were just one of the boys, so to speak. If the wife showed an interest, I know that this is a touchy area here but I think it is important that the husband and wife team is still an important aspect of Foreign Service life. I could not say anything about it, but I found people who had never been to the ambassador's house, had never met his wife, "he has never been to my office, I don't think he knows what I am doing". This type of response. We would sometimes be able to make a recommendation. I remember one political appointee we talked to and said "people would like to see your home" and she said, "it never occurred to me, I will start tomorrow" and so she made sure that the secretaries and communicators were invited to big parties, receptions cocktail parties and the like. She was grateful for it. Being a political appointee, she was less likely to be conscious of it.

Relations between State personnel and other agency personnel, attaché¹/₂s, Defense, Agricultural, Civil Air, can be fairly crucial. If the other agencies were barely tolerated by, say the head of the political or economic section, there just was not the working relationship that there should have been. You can get an awful lot of exchange of information if you talk to your colleagues. They see things that you would not see in your work. So I think that was an important part of it. You get individuals who are very good people yet they are playing Departmental politics. You get the feeling that, yes, they are doing a good job but uppermost in their mind is, "how will this help my career?" They are not backstabbing or anything like that but really what they are doing is "I want to get to the attention of the desk officer, the ambassador." I wonder sometimes if this was not being overdone, it is hard to tell. You find people who were just plain sloppy and nobody was doing anything about it. I really don't know what you can do about it. People who did not dress well or were physically dirty. It seemed to me it required a kind of supervision that was lacking. I would always make a point, the two times I was principal officer, of saying as soon as I arrived that "this is what I consider a suitable dress code for this office, winter or summer" to sort of let them know in advance. Another thing that I think was important, not as an inspector but as a principal officer, was that "when I invite you to my receptions, at least as far as you, the officers concerned, this is not just a social event, this is a working event, and I really expect you to mingle with the guests. I can't require that the wife do this. I would like it if she did, but no way can I command it. Just don't stand in the corner talking with your wife. Just don't stand and talk with a fellow officer. Get out there and press the flesh, talk to people and show an interest in what they are doing." That requires a degree of supervision I think must come early on in the game. I would also say, "By the way, speak to my wife, she is not going to hurt you, she is also hosting this party. She is not a fixture to be ignored." Perhaps it is not appropriate to discuss the role of the wife in this discussion?

Q: I think it is appropriate as we are trying to capture how one worked within the Foreign Service and we are not trying to support the "party line" but the real world.

BAHTI: I think a wife can contribute to the making or breaking, not of a post, but the success or lack of success of a principal officer, maybe less so an ambassador. But at a smaller post where the principal officer does the bulk of the entertaining it seems to me to be very important that the wife play an active role. My own wife has been wonderful in that respect, she not only was the hostess, but in many cases was the cook and bottle washer. She is an excellent cook, supervised the staff and all I did was show up and make sure that there was enough scotch on hand. She took a great deal of personal interest in the staff, the wives, the kids. She is a nurse so that helped. The rules are that you can't say one word to the wives about what they can or can't do. I see more and more cases of wives who do not even want to go overseas; they get married to Foreign Service officers and then a few years later say, "What, we are going to live overseas? Give up my brain surgery in the States?" I think it is too bad, there is so much to be learned, so much pleasure to be had, so many hardships to be shared living overseas. That is in part what the Foreign Service is about, of sharing the good things and the bad things. What you remember is mainly the good things.

Q: You then had sort of a different assignment, the Sinai Field Mission, from 1978 to 1979.

BAHTI: I was supposed to go out there for a two year tour and my wife was supposed to live in Jerusalem, which she did. She was finishing up her work as a nurse in the Department of State. I knew Ray Hunt, I was interviewed for the job. He said that if I could come out right away I could be his deputy. Well, I really had not planned to leave right then, but that was the condition and so I left my wife at home with the house, the packing, the whole schmeer. It was kind of a dirty trick, but it was an interesting job working between the Israelis and Egyptians. In some respects it was a non-job since the director's job and my job in total was perhaps a job and a half. There was a lot of make work stuff, a lot of reporting which even then seemed kind of silly. Camel reports and Bedouin sightings.

Q: Camel reports meant?

BAHTI: You saw so many camels. And camels usually meant people. Boredom was the biggest problem and some people who get bored tend to drink. We had a bar there and cheap liquor, we had some drinking problems, some people sent home, there were fights. But we had a lot of contact with the Egyptians and Israelis. That was gratifying to me since it was my field, so to speak, and there was this glorious day when all three flags were flown above our compound. Up to that time we did not fly any flags, although it was clearly an American mission. It was mostly contract people, E-Systems from Texas did the bulk of the work. The State Department and USIA people were the communicators and liaison officers with the Israelis and Egyptians. It was there that for the first time the Israelis and Egyptians met under peaceful conditions in the Sinai to work out the terms of the agreement as it would apply on the ground. It was a pleasure to see these young Israeli and young Egyptian officers fraternizing and being genuinely friendly. They are the ones who are going to get killed if there is another war.

My tour was cut short because peace broke out and it was pretty hard to justify a mission of that size so I left after thirteen months. My wife in the meantime had been living in an old town house in Jerusalem. I would get there every three or four weeks for a long weekend so I saw a lot of Israel and especially Jerusalem in that time. I also got to Cairo a couple of times. So I call that tour my second Egyptian tour. For my wife, that meant two moves in less than a year.

Q: Did you have much contact with our embassies in Tel Aviv and Cairo? How did that operation mesh?

BAHTI: There were personal problems-my wife did not fit in any staffing pattern-she was supposed to be supported by the embassy in Tel Aviv but lived in Jerusalem. The Consulate General in Jerusalem was not as supportive as I thought they might have been. The liaison officers would visit there occasionally and make deliveries or whatever was needed.

When there was a violation of the armistice agreement, when there was an overflight by an Israeli plane or helicopter, or an Egyptian would stray across the line, we would send off immediate flashes to each embassy, Tel Aviv and Cairo and to the UN delegation in New York and to the Department in Washington. When those things happened that relieved the boredom. We spent a lot of time keeping the people busy, games and the like. We were surrounded by Ghanaian troops who were our protectors as they were in charge of the territory where we were located. We had a lot of contact with the embassy and we would invariably call upon them when we went into town. My boss, Ray Hunt, tended to go to Cairo more often than to Israel- -his wife lived in Cairo. When, for instance, we were preparing for this exchange of documents ceremony the Israelis came in and supplied certain of the equipment, flagpoles and stanchions and all to keep the crowds back-and they painted them all Israeli blue. I sent out a message to Cairo saying that this may create a little problem for the Egyptians. Ambassador Eilts said in effect, "You are damned right this will cause a problem-can't they be painted white or something?" We explained to the Israelis that Israeli blue would not do-so they came in and painted it all silver. We consulted with both embassies because both ambassadors were present at the ceremony.

Q: The ceremony was doing what?

BAHTI: Exchanging instruments of ratification of the Camp David accords. This put the Camp David agreement into effect. It was a big day, the press was out there in force. The Department was thinking of sending out a lot of people. I said, "Hey, there is no place here to stay." We were talking about doubling up, but it did not work out that way. They came out in the morning and left in the evening. We would occasionally give dinners for the UN people or the Israeli defense or Egyptian defense people. It never happened that the Israelis and Egyptians were there at the same time until the last few months we were there. It was quite an experience. I am glad I had it. From a career point of view it was in no sense a traditional job, but I was getting a bit long in the tooth anyway. It was a lot of fun. I met a lot of people with whom I still keep in touch.

Q: You came back to Washington for about two years?

BAHTI: Yes, it was again the wrong timing. I got this job as executive secretary of the Board of the Foreign Service, which has nothing to do with the examination procedure. It deals with certain grievance procedures and selection out for cause and various messy, behavior unbecoming an officer and that sort of thing. Refusal to accept an assignment. We would have hearings, prepare all kinds of papers, we would have an administrative judge who would come in and ultimately judge the case. We would deal with the attorneys of the accused person. Each case was uniquely different, you could not describe any of them as typical, some was just behavior that I would not even like to talk about. I worked with the Grievance Board as these issues often led to a grievance or stemmed from an grievance. It was not a very busy job.

I was supposed to be on David Newsom's staff and also for AID matters, but I was physically removed by three floors and it was always easier for him to hand something to one of the people working in his office to check things out. So I was rarely called on in that capacity, although I attended his weekly staff meetings which were always interesting. This was the time of the Iranian hostage crisis. David Newsom was the under secretary for political affairs. A fine man to work for, very good rapport with his staff, a good sense of humor. Obviously the Board of the Foreign Service was not at the top of his list, but he was conscientious about it.

Q: Did you ever have the feeling that, having been in the Foreign Service for some time, that there was a real problem that there was too much legal action taking place, people were turning to this when it was obvious they were unsuitable for the Foreign Service but it could not get rid of them?

BAHTI: Less so in the Board of the Foreign Service. I did see a significant growth in the number of grievances by people who were protesting a bad performance evaluation or perhaps should not have been in the Foreign Service but wanted to stay in. Very often the grievances were justified. The Grievance Board would support these, and sometime not. I think that the litigation was more in the grievance area than in what I would call "my area", that is the Board of the Foreign Service, which did not deal with grievances per se. It was not a busy office whereas the Grievance office was very busy.

Q: Coming to your last post, Alexandria, where you were from 1981 to 1983 as consul general, what was the situation in Egypt at that time? Had it changed?

BAHTI: It had not changed much from my earlier tour there in the early 1970s. We had a large AID program doing big projects, storage towers for grain and for tallow. We were replacing the entire sewage system of Alexandria. There were all kinds of water projects, other sewage projects going elsewhere in Egypt, huge sums of money as the result of the Camp David accords. We were putting like 3 billion dollars per year into Egypt for economic and military assistance alone, not to mention PL 480 sales. So relations were good, the Egyptians were pleased with what we were doing. The problem was really spending the money. We could not get projects to the point where they would pass the various tests or requirements that they had to pass to be judged viable, useful and practicable. Nevertheless lots was going on, you could see the handclasp sign [the AID logo] everywhere. I remember in Alex we established a two storied building to teach young women from the villages to operate sewing machines. These were big sewing machines, power machines, which they learned very quickly and then they would be able to work in other factories which specialized in clothing. We would attend dedications of the projects, along with the ambassador when he had the time to come to Alexandria. I went to Cairo quite often and the ambassador came to Alexandria often-Ambassador Roy Atherton. It was nice to work for and with him again. He was a very personable individual, as was his wife. We had a good working relationship with the embassy.

My problem in Alex was the staff. I did not have an administrative officer. Fortunately I had a first rate secretary who took on many of the admin functions, such as locating housing. There was no government owned housing there except the principal officer's residence. We had to go out and lease all the time, paint, furnish. It was a horrendous job. After I left two and half years later the consulate got an administrative officer. With one consular officer, I was the only other officer there with a consular exequatur, so when the consular officer was sick or on leave, I was back to my early job interviewing visa applicants and issuing visas. It cut heavily into my time; also, the admin work did the same. As a result I did not have the time to do as much political reporting as I should. There was a lot going on there. The Arab Socialist Union was active there and I knew a number of people who were active in it. There was some dissident activity there, the fundamentalists.

Q: Were you there when Sadat was assassinated?

BAHTI: Yes, I was in my residence, actually, on that day and I stayed in radio contact with the consulate. My consular officer, David Usery was at the office and our communicator. Rather than go out I decided for the first couple of hours to sit tight and see what happened. In fact nothing much happened-in fact it was a holiday. I have always argued, that no one really believed, one of the reasons why there were not a lot of demonstrations, wailing and beating of breasts in Alexandria was because it was a holiday. The people did not want to be done out of their holiday-they would demonstrate on company time, but not on their own. I may be wrong, but I put that in writing in my report. From then on we were a little more active on keeping an eye on fundamentalist activities-the dress of the students, the elections in the various faculties of the university and within student groups. What was going on at the mosques on Fridays, what happened when the price of bread went up-as a short answer they had another riot and destroyed a bakery. So I did what I could but felt badly. The inspectors said you have to do more reporting. I said, "You tell me how and I will do it". They said, "We don't know, but you had better figure out something". By that time I had resolved to retire at the age of sixty and that is the way it worked out.

Q: What was your impression of the effectiveness of our AID program there? I was just listening to a talk by Hal Saunders who said that he always regretted that we got AID money tied into the Camp David accords, that it really was not necessary. Was this money chasing around looking for something to do?

BAHTI: No. There were lots of things to do. The problem as I suggested earlier was describing with some precision what we wanted to do so we could then say, "OK here is \$1.6 million to do this, to put a wing on a maternity clinic or child care clinic, to set up a school for girls from the country to learn how to operate sewing machines. Their ideas were sometimes kind of cockeyed-"Let's build an elevated highway from Aswan to Alexandria, that will be the American Highway." Well, that made some sense, going through all those villages was a real pain, but as a practical matter there were plenty of other places where it should be sent. Just redoing the sewers of both Alexandria and Cairo was terribly important. They were constantly erupting; the streets were just flooded with sewage and people walking through it, it was just disgusting, sewage being dumped right into the Nile which then goes into the Mediterranean. But this was a long project. I doubt if it is even finished now for during the summer they have to shut the whole project down because Alex is flooded with tourists from Cairo and elsewhere in Egypt. You can't have all these streets closed down, so they would stop work for about four months, and then start up again. It was just very, very inefficient. I told the governor that I really think you are going at this the wrong way, shut it down for a short period, but you don't have to shut the whole thing down, there are some streets which do not have to be open for tourists. I never got very far. Cairo knew this. I said that this project is going to be one of the biggest black marks on our AID program, the failure of the Alexandria sewage project. Nobody cared. It was too bad.

Q: Looking back on your career, what gave you the greatest satisfaction?

BAHTI: I was asked that question in the retirement course just before I retired and I concluded that it was working with and helping people. The things I was proudest of involved helping people with problems, whether it was getting their doctor-husband permission to return to the States after coming back to Egypt because of his U.S. financed-training, or helping locate and finding out who was killed in the Pan Am bombing in the Rome airport. (Most were ARAMCO dependents-we had a horrendous forty-eight hours trying to get that information.) A lot of hand holding, an American husband whose wife was seized by her family, who did not believe they were married because they were married by a justice of the peace and that did not count. Dealing with people who were, at least initially, unqualified for a visa. Writing up petition-type cables, justifying issuance. I think that was the most satisfying thing.

I did not mention working with U.S. Navy in Alex. The Navy could be very good in doing things for charitable groups, that was kind of fun and good PR. There was always a big reception, especially when the carriers came in. Fortunately we had a huge backyard in the residence. That was enjoyable, but the preparation for it was my wife's responsibility and she was getting a little sour about it after twenty-six or twenty- seven years, had just about had it preparing hors d'oeuvres.

Q: If somebody were to come to you today, a young person, and ask about the Foreign Service as a career, how would you respond?

BAHTI: I have not followed it as closely as I should, this new thinking that this is to be a career that you follow for five or ten or fifteen years and then you either get out or are forced out and you do something else. I think that is unhealthy. I think that had we enforced the selection-out policy years back we would not have had this top-heavy apparatus that we had not too many years ago and perhaps still have. I think we probably over-corrected it in limiting the number of years you could stay in a certain grade in the senior Foreign Service. I was in the Senior Foreign Service, and when I became sixty I wanted to do a lot of things while I could still walk around. I remember when I first came to Washington for an interview in the Department and there was this family; I went up to them and asked them the same question. "I am thinking of entering the Foreign Service, what do you think of it?" It turns out that they were AID, they loved it and that helped make up my mind. I think that if there is a wife and she has an important career, it is probably not the thing to do unless you are going to take an unaccompanied tour of duty, and I am not sure that is healthy. I think a wife, if she is going overseas, like it or not, there will be some responsibilities that she will have to take on. Her husband simply cannot take people to restaurants and bars to do his representation. It does not work well.

If you want to see the world, sometimes exotic places, sometimes not, and put up with a certain amount of discomfort in exchange for these, then I say, go to it. Play your cards properly in selecting your assignment if you can, if you like to work with people go to consulates, if you want to do heavier political and economic reporting and make your name then stay with embassies.

I enjoyed my twenty-eight and a half years and would not discourage anyone, but they would have to go in with their eyes open, recognizing the problems that may face them part way down their career. They may not be able to spend a full career, and they may not want to. You might be forced out sooner than you want to. I guess that is my response. I am not the least bit sorry. I would have done things differently as regards assignments, but that is water over the dam.

Q: Thank you very much.

End of interview